

The Inner Life of Christ

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There are several attitudes taken at the present time to the facts and principles of the Gospel history. To give age its precedence, there are people who still cling to the old style which was after this recipe. First, you procure the raw material. This may be had from any dealer. He will find you the historical fact. He will tell you what you must believe. He will bring it to your *knowledge*. There is of course no religion in that. This some take home and pass it slowly through a sieve, coarse or fine. They give it an attention more or less critical. And then give to what remains, all or part, your assent. There is still no religion. Then you set the material in full or in part to simmer in your mind till you feel a gentle warmth from it. Some let it boil. You receive a certain tonic from its essence of meaning. But as the material is not God but something about God, the religion is defective, however passionate, and it is apt to become a zeal for truth instead of reality. If I may change the metaphor, by the time you have fully examined the fact or truth you may have chilled it down pretty well, and there is a crust of ice on its surface, not without certain forms or designs. As you go on with the treatment which is to crystallize your assent the ice thickens. And one day you decide that it will bear, and you trust yourself to walk on it with great confidence, or, if you are a scholastic theologian, to skate in figures.

It is the old sequence of *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*, whether with orthodox fulness or rationalist reduction. You understand, believe, trust certain things about God. This sequence makes a poor and mechanical account of the psychology of belief; and such a description of the process suffers no wrong in being described as I have done. It is a scheme which is intellectualist, scholastic, and catholicist in its nature, though it was taken over by early Protestantism and still survives in many quarters.

Secondly, there are those who start from the opposite extreme. They are indifferent to historic facts and their burthen of grace. They are content with the impressions that flow from personalities or ideas. Never mind if the personality did not really exist. The story carries an ideal fact if not a historic. It need not seriously matter if behind the idea no reality can be proved to work. We have the value. The aesthetic effect on us, the impressiveness, is all. A myth is held to be as valuable as a fact if it produce the same impression on the soul. The story can serve as a parable, if its historicity be dissolved. Never mind if we lose a historic Jesus so long as we have a living church inspired with the ideas that crystallized in that myth.

Now that is all very well with certain stories, which in their nature are more impressive than creative, and exist more for edification than for regeneration. It may be quite well with some of the early parts of the Old Testament. But it is not well for the redemptive facts to which faith owes its existence, and from which the new life is born. The atonement is not the piece of imagination that the story of the prodigal was. It was not a lesson but a deed. To treat the saving facts as mere symbols is to reduce deeds to words and action to picture. It is to treat impression as if it were faith, and to reduce the Church to masses of moved auditors in the hands of the preaching temperament. But we have to go on and

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ask if the vivid impression wears. Does it last as long as does creative regeneration working from historic fact? Will it carry a Church? The idea cannot be separated from history when we are dealing with the salvation of history, nor can personality from moral reality. You cannot continue to create moral personality from legends and ideas. If love could live on mythology, faith could not. Love will keep poets going but not apostles, and it will kindle circles but it will not carry a church. The capital of the Church is a faith that works out into love because it is faith in love; and faith as a moral power can only rise from revealed fact, from love in action, not from fictitious persons nor from imposing ideas.

Thirdly, there are those who take a middle course. They pursue a criticism not merely critical but constructive. They are not critical only but historical. They recognize the central and creative value of fact. And what they do is to prune and not to fell. They work by reduction. They trim down the record to a nucleus of fact like Schmiedel's nine pillars of Christian belief. To such residuum they refer faith. There is but the ground-floor left of the Gospel record after the bombardment, and they occupy it—believing they thus keep close to the street and the man in it.

Their procedure keeps a reminiscence of the first group. Let us become convinced of a body of fact, or its biographical truth, even if it is but a minimum, and then let us devote ourselves to it. They do not all do this on the same scale as Orthodoxy but the course is not very different. The first thing is historical substantiation; and faith must wait till that is done by us or for us. They ignore the psychological fact that religious faith does not wait on logical process, that belief rests on much more than evidence as its authority, that its intellectual assent is wrapped up in emotional thought and floats suspended in the act of faith itself. They also ignore

the fact that the original Christ was not so much an object of men's knowledge as a power that first knew them; that He was not simply an object of attention but from the first was inseparable from the power that made them attend and gave to their attention vision; that He was more the Creator than the recipient of the faith of His apostles; that the real Christ was first the Christ in action and then the Christ preached, and not the Christ remaining at the end of an analysis. He began as the Christ of faith and not of knowledge. And so He still begins. Our knowledge of Him is not an antecedent of our faith but a factor in it, not a mere cause but an ingredient. Christian thought is emotional thought, moral thought, thought suspended in an experience of something else than thinking. It is implicit in the religious response, in the moral committal, in the experience of the conscience. It is not the parent of faith—although neither is it its handmaid; it is its twin sister at least. That is the difference between committal to a scheme we must first examine and committal to a Person to whom we leap or move by a great surmise in the act of committal, whom we know as we trust Him and to whom we give our love before we realize how worthy He is of it. We must love Him ere He seem worthy of our love. No foundation which is merely historic will carry a faith certain, absolute, and eternal, a faith in which the soul is committed for its eternity, because the results of historic investigation can at no stage be called quite final. They are always revisable. And the Person of Christ which is to be the foundation of living faith must be something else than the residuary legacy of historic research. He must come to us in a more living and sacramental way, as the Christ of the creative Cross comes. And this can never be done by Christ as a calm, sane, noble but statuesque personality or presence, however attractive, fine, or ideal. We must found any-

thing so real as eternity on a historic fact; but on one too creative of history to be given by history alone. We cannot found on the mere impressiveness of such a fact, on its value to us apart from questions of its reality. Such impression is not the chief work of the Spirit. It must have in it a more regenerative and creative power. Is the Cross but an affecting expression of Christ's person; or is it the nature, genius, ground plan, the constitutive principle and formative purpose of it? Is it the last action of reality on reality? It is one of the banes of religion that it becomes more impressive than real.

The fourth way is more religious and less academic than the other three. It treats the object of faith as more of a living thing. It does not begin with our critical action on inert fact at arm's length as it were, but with the action of the living fact on us. It does not begin with Him as a mere object of common knowledge, nor as a residue of critical science. It does not wait to feel Christ till it has proved Christ. Its fact is the inner life of Christ, which does not emerge from critical methods, is not at their mercy, and leaves faith immune from their results. This, it is said, is the reality on which faith stands. This is what elicits faith, creates it. The figure pictured in the Gospels steps from its frame, and lays hold of us, winds its way into us, and makes abode with us. It convinces us of its reality, not prior to our faith, but in the act of creating it.

Now, we have here something that seems to deliver faith from a rationalist license to exist. The object of faith proves itself in making the faith. We have a worthy psychology of belief, a religious one. We are on right lines.

But is it certain that even here we have really escaped from the ban of impressionism? It is doubtful if we have really got a faith which is more than aesthetic,

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which is ethical enough to overcome the world. Have we more than a profound impression of Christ's personality, an impression so ethical, so intimate that it seems final religion? Have we here created a real evangelical trust in Him as Redeemer? And by real I mean a trust which disposes of our whole personality to Him, and masters, redeems and renews the whole world forever. I mean a faith which is a self-committal forever and not a mere venture. Is our faith faith in a redemption which can be treated as at bottom a new creation? We have delightful books which aim at a sympathetic or a romantic psychology of Christ; they teem with happy stories with the conjectural freshness of a vivid mind, reading between the lines of the record, but missing the roar of the buried stream and the force of its pressure at the Cross which altered the configuration of the world. Indeed some disfigure their work, otherwise able and engaging, by letting themselves gird at those theologians who work at such fundamental constructions below the garden beds and *apergus*. Does the whole person of Christ run up into the Cross and its crucial effect? Is it there for redemption's sake?

Of all the German theologians on the liberal side, Herrmann, whose view I have been describing, is the one whose theology is most bound up with personal religion; but does Herrmann get to the core of evangelical faith as a revolutionary power, the world-power and the last power? What does he mean by the inner life of Christ? The very inmost life of Christ we cannot get at. For it was lived in the closest communion of the Son with His Father alone. None can tell what passed in those nights of prayer. None could hear. Could we understand if we were told the communion of the eternal Father and Son? But leaving that as inaccessible, and keeping to what would usually be understood as Christ's inner life, what was it? We get glimpses of the contour

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of His thought. All His teaching was more or less autobiographical. What was its paradigm? What was its note? What was it that filled His consciousness? It was not a mere sense of His personality—that were too egoist. Nor of the presence and blessing of the Father—that were but saintly. It was more than a piety, it was a purpose, and one mystically moral, national, and historic. You should not speak of the Jesus of history unless you treat His problem as first national. Seek first the Kingdom of God, He said. And His precepts, as I say, are autobiography. He did not prescribe what he did not do. The Kingdom of God engrossed Him. It was His first concern always in life and death. It was the keynote of His theology as it must become of ours. Round it gathered His profoundest piety, but also much more. The effect it produced in Him was more than devoutness of the first water. Allowing that He gave His inner self to us, that was not as man gives himself to man, and friend dominates friend. It was *for* us, more than *to* us. It was as the King gives Himself for the Kingdom, the Redeemer for His people. The Person that comes to us is not simply a spiritual splendour, a divine benediction, a moral boon, in the highest degree sympathetic, impressive or revelatory, but He is redemptive, He is creative, He is regenerative. He does the royal thing and not just the kindly thing. He forgives. He does not simply get the revelation home to a native religiosity, but He redeems us into the power of taking it home. There is a new creation. And all in virtue of what the Gospels show to have been Christ's first charge. His prime concern was with the Holy Father King, with the delighting, the satisfying, of Him. He it was that filled the Saviour's thought at the end—He rather than man, He and what was owed to Him. All benefit to man was in virtue of an atoning death to God. The Kingdom was not simply righteous-

ness, joy, or peace as subjective frames, but as social relations between the members of the community rising out of the kingship of God (See the exegesis of Romans 14 : 17). It was a moral standing with God, and a moral relation to each other, no less than a subjective and personal piety. It was also the destruction of the Prince of this World no less than it was the power of our eternal life. The Kingdom was something which was set up for good and all in the Cross, by a finished work corresponding to the complete holiness and energy of His person. The holy kingship of sovereignty was met by an equally holy kingship of subordination. It was such a Cross that came to fill and make the inner mind of Christ—the Cross not just as the principle of sacrifice but as the power of the Kingdom of God and its redemption. ✓

Herrmann, it has been pointed out, has put us on the right question—what is the inner mind of Christ as a fact and a power, and not only as a consciousness—as a power to be owned and not simply as a character to be sympathetically met? What was His purpose, His life-work, His goal? What did He come to do with all that it was in Him to be? What was the act on which His whole mind constantly and growingly crystallized? Was it a case simply of coming in, and sitting down, and supping with us severally to our great refreshment and cheer? The gift from God is Christ of course. Also it is Christ's gift of Himself. But of Himself as what? As the chief of saints? The prince of sages? The heavenliest of friends? The divinest of benedictions? The holiest of influences? Did He do anything decisive for us, or did He just infuse us with His personality in the way of intercourse? Did He act chiefly in a redemptive or only in a sacramental way? Does He just walk with us always unharmed amid the world's flames? Does He but hold our hand as we die unto the world? What was the active mind, the purposed consciousness of

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Christ, the deed into which the whole personality went? There is something in Herrmann to suggest in Christ a fixed quantity, if we may so say, a vivid, vital, but closed personality, with a place for us—the Father's house with many mansions—or a power in us. And there is too little to suggest His atoning work and His new creative power. There is not enough to suggest, as part of His work and conquest, the growth of His personality in realizing and facing the necessity not of sacrifice merely but of an atoning Cross as the end closed in on Him. Herrmann is anxious to meet the crux of the hour and to deliver faith from a dependence on the critics—so anxious that he thinks the inner life of Christ lays hold of us in a way which secures our soul though the recorded facts may crumble like the sacramental bread. Indeed the whole value of Christ for him seems more sacramental than creative. Christ as a personality seizes us so mightily that this capture may be called the redemptive thing, and we become immune from any trouble from the questions raised about the outer detail in the tradition of Him. Hermann says the redemptive value is in the whole inner life, and not in any particular in the story of it. If he had said not in every particular, one could but agree. But, as Hunziger notes, it is another matter to say not in *any* particular of the story. That gives away too much to the mystics, who are only too ready to detach revelation from history and from a crucial redemption. Of course the vital thing is the Person of Christ in His action. There we found. But we do not find in a Person independent of every fact in His story; not in a Person that could survive their dissolution; not in a Person whose efficacy (like a parable) quite transcended His actuality, and whose power sat loose to soluble events associated with it. For if we press an independence like that we must be prepared to say that the *cross* just falls into line with the other facts;

that, like any one of these, it too might be otiose; that there could be a revelation of God which was mere exhibition, or mere impression, without definite and decisive action on the moral universe; that the Cross, as the consummation of such action, especially on God (as in prayer), did not run implicit through the whole inner life of Christ, and swiftly grow upon it, and grow more deeply engaged in it; that the element of action upon the last reality of things was to that extent lacking, and was not supplied, as moral redemption requires it, by those beneficent activities of Christ's which survive criticism, like the miracles of healing.

So we have a fifth attitude to the historic fact, in which, while it is not only not inert for our observation but active for our impression, it is active in the way not of mere impression but of regeneration, of new creation.

There are historic facts which can be verified in our own experience, and there are those that cannot. The latter would be represented by the Virgin Birth, the former by the Cross and the Resurrection. We can say we have met with the risen Christ, or that in the Cross so crowned God has spoken and dealt with us in a way more certain than all else. And these facts, so verifiable in the religious experience, differ very widely indeed from the other facts in history, even in Christ's history, as man differs vitally from all the career of Nature before him. They come from the last interior of His life, and they go to the centre of ours. They unload on us the grand burthen and purpose of His soul. He poured out His soul unto that death. All the current of His being came to a head and issued there as in no other act of His whatever, and certainly as in no word of His. His soul had a history and not only a being, not only a vitality. His inmost self was ever more deeply elicited by events. It had a drama, a conflict mounting to a real close. It

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was acted on by circumstances, and it reacted on them; and in the double process it found itself. In a real sense He proved and found His soul and with it the whole moral world. He discovered what was in Him. He was born to die, and constituted by His very holiness to atone. And this came home to Him, always infallibly, but always more and more perfectly, as He passed deeper into the tragedy of the conflict. And it was action that was drawn forth from His last depths. Cross and Resurrection did not just happen to Him, they were done by Him as the consummation of all else. They make Christ Christ for us. They make Him God for us. They are what faith seizes as the creative source and power of the new life. They give us our certainty. And remember, the question is as to that certainty. Therefore it is not a scientific question but a moral. It is not a question of psychology but of conscience. Religion needs less to be psychologized than moralized. It is not a question of the way faith rises in time, but of what gives faith final and eternal foundation. And the real foundations of the universe are in the moral region. There we touch the last reality. And chiefly we do so in the greatest and most universal of all the moral acts known to us—in the atonement of an unholy world by a perfectly holy God in His perfectly holy Son. It is in the meeting of God's holiness by a holiness equal to His own. That is the foundation of all ethic as of all religion. Whatever in the tradition shakes this must not. It could not, without bringing to the ground at last the whole fabric of Christian faith. The detachment of religion from its centre in a real atonement is what most impairs the note of Christian ethic. That atonement makes Christianity a religion apart, and not only the superlative of all religion. Lighted by the Resurrection it was what gave all the rest of Christ's life meaning to the disciples, whom it translated into Apostles. The Gospels are not biographies,

not *memorabilia*; they are *Leidensgeschichten*. They preach the gospel of Redemption. They crystallize on the Cross. They make all Christ's inner life full of such crucial meaning to the Church and to the world as no other man's nor indeed the whole of history can be. He would of course have been eminent without Cross and Resurrection, but not divine, not saving, not of equal and final value for all men. He would have been a splendid figure but not an eternal Saviour, a glorious example but not inimitably creative—the prince of saints but not the King of the Kingdom of God, the Lord of a New Humanity He called into being. He would not have lifted the world out of its impotence and its alienation from God. His life would not have been lived *for* us so much as *before* us, with an effect more aesthetical than ethical. He would have been man's spiritual jewel, our Morning Star—displayed as a glory more than felt as a power or worshipped as Lord; but He would not have been our atonement. He would not have been Redeemer, however priceless a gift and possession. His mere inner life, however it impressed or exalted us, could never by itself have redeemed us. He would have idealized all sacrifice, and put on it a divine seal, but He would not have made His sacrifice the very act of God as our Saviour. And that is what we need really—not simply redemption *to* God but *by* God. It is in His death that God Himself with certainty speaks to us, redeems us, and works on us the new life. Christ's inner life impresses us so much only because His death makes it do more. It makes it all converge to redeem and regenerate us. And it does that because it did justice to the God we had wronged. That inner life becomes the slow emergence and rising action of the Cross of our atonement. The whole history of Christ's soul if it is studied historically, *i.e.*, nationally, without the importations of our too modern idealisms, or our too subjective

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piety, shows a growing detachment from action on men and a growing concentration on action on God. It shows a retreating consideration for men's claims behind a preoccupation with God's. Till at the close it was God, and what was due to God, that engrossed Him. God's need of His death threw into the shade even man's need. And the moral necessity to atone became the first condition of His power to recreate.

We should realize that the inner life of Jesus was not a thing stationary in its intense movement, like a teeming or a revolving globe. It was nothing which descends on us in a finished form as a closed personality from the very first. Personality is not mere individuality. It is a thing that does not come with us but grows in us; and it had a growth in Him as He deepened and rose to the fulness of His true vocation, and from prophet became priest. There He came to His real self. The inmost life of Jesus was, through His growing experience, always coming to the top, finding its final self, and ripening to a goal of action. I have said that we could not reach the inmost life of Jesus in His midnight communion with God. I should not however stop there. We have indeed no express information about it. He was not of the kind to proclaim such hours, and make them common. To preach a full and free salvation is not to unload our secret soul to the man in the street or in the sty. But we do get a hint as to the nature of some such seasons in the story of the Transfiguration. There He spoke of the theme of His most interior and uplifted mind in contact with heaven; and it was of the decease He should accomplish at Jerusalem. And on Calvary, and there only, we do reach His last spiritual reserves. That sacrifice, that atonement, was what was always the dominant in His soul, even if in the early stages its full significance may have been below the level of His explicit experience and consciousness. His inner life was not stationary. It was

not intense only in its rotation or its fertility. But it was the gradual growth in clearness, depth, and power, of the conviction that the Cross would not only be His fate but was the requirement of God, was above all an offering to God, and needed by God more than by man. It was giving to God His own. He did not meet it till He accepted it; and He did not accept it till He was sure of that, sure of the divine δέῃ in it. And He was not perfectly sure till the very end. He was not without hope His Father might find another way. "If it be possible." Martyrdom He may have expected early in His public life but to die as the atonement God required for the hardened people, and so for the world—that was not early. The murder of John impressed Him with the conviction that death would be His fate, and sent Him to Jerusalem to force the issue and, with little hope, to force the nation to its last choice. As He lost hope in the people, as He failed as prophet, He poured out His Soul to God as priest. He gained power with God. That His death was needed by God as atonement was the conviction of the passion; and its offering was His consummation, the consummation of His person as well as of His vocation, the effectuation of His inner life, of all He was. He did not start with the Cross in a clear programme. How could His appeal to the nation have been *bona fide* if He was sure from the first it was all to be in vain. He had in Him not the programme of the Cross but the principle, which matured in the way great principles do, as the pressure of events and experience forced it out. The inner life of Christ was not so much a living forth of the Cross as a living *on* to the Cross, and to the Cross not as the sacrificial principle of life and being for great souls everywhere, but as the crucial atonement to God by His Son for a nation and a world that inflicted it as a doom and refused it as a redemption.